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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 006733

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA DAS FEIGENBAUM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/22/2021

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TX](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: NIYAZOV DEATH: TURKISH MFA ON TURKMENISTAN
TRANSITION

Classified by Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner for
Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

1. (C) PM Erdogan, FM Gul and Energy Minister Guler will lead a delegation of approximately 200 to attend Niyazov's funeral on Sunday in what Turkish MFA DDG for Central Asia Huseyin Avni Karslioglu characterized as a culturally necessary show of brotherly solidarity with their Turkmen brethren. Karslioglu appreciated the U.S. effort to consult with the Turks on the transition. He urged a gradual approach to Turkmenistan during the upcoming period in support of Turkey's twin goals of progress and stability. End Summary.

Be Cautious; Stability is Key;
Be Careful of Russia and Iran;

2. (C) The Turkish government is urging stability and calm both publicly and privately. In a press release issued December 21 to announce PM Erdogan's and FM Gul's intentions to attend the funeral, the statement noted that "it is important that there won't be a vacuum and uncertainty in Turkmenistan." MFA DDG Karslioglu said Turkey does not want "business as usual" in Turkmenistan, but stressed that stability will be most important in the coming period. Stability does not necessarily mean continuity, he noted. Turkey and the U.S. should support cautious change, without immediate criticism of the Niyazov regime and without pushing too hard, too quickly. Turkey and the U.S. should not be overly ambitious in our expectations for change, including in terms of democratic development, although we both support that, he noted. We noted that this appeared to be an opportunity for new, albeit gradual beginnings, and stressed we wanted to coordinate closely with the GOT.

3. (C) We cannot afford to ignore Russia, Karslioglu stated. Russia will not lose its grip on Turkmenistan; they are better positioned than the U.S. and Turkey to influence developments. Pushing too hard or fast on change will only play into the hands of the Russians, particularly regarding gas. Russia will prefer "business as usual," with one-man rule that they can manipulate and perhaps control. Turkey is

hopeful that, with time, reconciliation between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan could result in reviving the Caspian Basin pipeline; the Turks will work with the Azeris to that end. (Karslioglu leaves mid-January to be the Turkish Ambassador in Baku.) Iran's influence and interests should also be taken into account, he said; all should be careful not to play into Iran's hands.

Government Transition

14. (C) Karslioglu said that, in his opinion, it was important to maintain the unspoken, unwritten balance of the five major clans in Turkmenistan. He cautioned against elevating a small clan to power with outside backing -- an approach he has seen lead to disaster before. He said there is consensus among the clans at the moment. Karslioglu also wondered what role, if any, opposition figures currently in exile might play in the transition, as well as those major opposition figures jailed by Niyazov after the coup attempt. The lack of education and an intelligentsia is a problem, Karslioglu opined, and those educated opposition figures may try to play a role. While Turkmenbashi was not a butcher in the Stalin model, he did keep his people uneducated as he saw to their basic needs. Turkmenistan does not have a viable military or a government bureaucracy capable of making decisions.

Turkish Delegation a Reflection of Cultural Ties

15. (C) Karslioglu characterized FM Gul's remarks and the official MFA statement (para 6) as "throwing flowers," as it

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reflects geographic and cultural norms after a death in this part of the world. It is a message of the links and heritage between Turks and Turkmen. "The Turkmen of Anatolia are coming," he said. It is tradition -- even if relations were not warm -- to show respect at the time of death. PM Erdogan, FM Gul and Energy Minister Guler will lead a delegation of approximately 200 to attend Sunday's funeral. Members from all fields -- health, education, business, for example -- comprise the delegation, Karslioglu said. FM Gul will leave for Ashgabat the morning of December 23 and PM Erdogan will follow in the evening. The delegation will depart December 24 after the funeral. He noted that many in the delegation had some role in assisting Turkmenistan in the past. For instance, Turkey supported and secretly largely funded Turkmenistan's efforts to change from the Cyrillic alphabet to the Latin, he said. FM Gul, then a State Secretary in the 1990s, had been personally invested in the

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project.

16. (U) Unofficial translation of MFA statement on December 21:

Begin Text:

We have learned with great sorrow that Turkmenistan President Saparmurat Turkmenbashi passed away on December 21, 2006. Our President, the TGNA Speaker, PM and FM, with condolence messages that they sent both for themselves and for the Turkish people, to their Turkmeni counterparts, expressed that they shared the great sorrow that the brotherly Turkmenistan people felt over the death of President Turkmenbashi.

The late President Turkmenbashi led his country after brotherly Turkmenistan won its independence following the collapse of the USSR and served for protecting and strengthening the sovereignty and independence of his country and for the development of his people. Today Turkmenistan and the brotherly Turkmeni people are celebrating the 15th

anniversary of the independence that they won after centuries. Turkmenistan and brotherly Turkmeni people, as well as the entire Turkic world, has been grateful to the late Turkmenbasi for overcoming this historic and sensitive period in a sound and smooth way.

In line with the vision of great leader Saparmurat Turkmenbasi, who showed great efforts for developing and strengthening relations and cooperation between Turkmenistan and Turkey, cooperation and solidarity between our countries will further develop in the coming period.

We are fully confident that the brotherly country nation with its esteemed administrators, who are at threshold of a new period, will overcome the sensitive period lying ahead with great common sense and intelligence.

President Turkmenbasi will always be remembered with respect and affection in Turkey and in the Turkic world for his contributions to his country, his people and to the development of bilateral relations and cooperation.

End text.

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